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Representative Diana Urban  
Testimony in Support of HB 5344  
February 24, 2016

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Good morning Representative Tong, Senator Coleman, Vice Chairs, Ranking Members, and other members of the Committee. I am here to support **HB 5344 AAC SUPPORT FOR ANIMALS THAT ARE NEGLECTED OR CRUELLY TREATED**

It has become mainstream to recognize that there is a link between animal cruelty and future violent behavior - especially violent crimes against children and domestic partners. It has also become mainstream to recognize animal cruelty as an act of violence in and of itself. In fact, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) has promulgated the importance of animal cruelty by launching a national database on crimes of animal cruelty. These acts are now counted alongside such felony crimes as arson, burglary, assault and homicide in the FBI's criminal database. In January of 2016, The Bureau's National Incidence-Based Reporting System began collecting data from law enforcement agencies on animal cruelty. Previously these crimes, involving animals, were lumped into an "All Other Offenses" category. This change in reporting underscores the importance the FBI is placing on animal cruelty as an act of violence.

We have all seen the media coverage of acts of animal cruelty that make us cringe. In particular the story of "Desmond" moved a lot of people to action. Desmond was adopted by a young couple. The couple had a baby and then things began to go sour. The young man attempted to strangle his partner and she had him arrested but did not press charges. She then elected to leave with their baby. The young man ended up starving, beating, and ultimately strangling Desmond to death. Despite the prosecutor's recommendation, the perpetrator received Accelerated Rehabilitation (AR).

There are many examples of egregious animal cruelty that end up nolleed or with AR. In a report done by OLR, requesting the outcome of animal cruelty offenses from 2005-2010, it was found that there were 3,153 total offenses with 18% found guilty, 47% nolleed, 33% received AR, and 2% were not guilty. I might add that before 2000 these records were purged and not archived. It was at my request that we began archiving the records in 2001; I am a firm believer that data can inform our decision making.

I look at HB 5344 as a win/win law. It will give the court another resource of supervised law students or pro bono lawyers to gather information on the act of animal cruelty. There would be no additional cost to the court. And our law students in Connecticut would have the opportunity to gain experience in our courts. I am thrilled to tell you that UConn has been an amazing partner in this endeavor and has given the bill their full support. In fact, I have Professor Jessica Rubin, from UConn Law, with me today. We welcome the participation of our other distinguished law schools in Connecticut. Department of Agriculture will keep a list of participating law schools and lawyers and make it available to the court; again at no cost.

The purpose of this bill is to highlight the seriousness of the crime of animal cruelty by recognizing that it is an act of violence and to impact the conviction rate of 18%. By interrupting the cycle of violence, the hope is to reduce the number of acts of animal cruelty and to intervene before a perpetrator escalates the violence to a child or domestic partner.

I have attached a copy of the OLR report on Animal Cruelty Cases as well as an article from "The Link" on the success of Connecticut's cross reporting law involving child abuse, animal cruelty and a cooperative cross-reporting arrangement between the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Agriculture.

Thanks you for your attention and I am happy to answer any questions.